

# Walking Mountains

“The green mountains are always walking” – *Daokai*



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*Dear Sangha and Friends,*

Long nights and short days, there's always work to do. Mice and moles scurry back and forth beneath the snow, bobcats and coyotes hunt, conifers move water around (believe it or not!). And although we might prefer to hibernate, work at the Zen Center seems to double with the ceremony season upon us.

We begin December honoring the Buddha's Enlightenment with a ceremony and the Rohatsu sesshin. We then move into the New Year's Eve ceremony, followed, in January, by the ceremony honoring Kannon, the Bodhisattva of Compassion.

It's an abundance of ceremonies, and yes, preparation. And all of our work is an offering, whether we are cleaning bathrooms or altars. The energy from our work spills out the door of the Center into the world at a time of year and world cycle when it is greatly needed. Our practice on the mat, chanting, workdays, and ceremonies truly help relieve the suffering of all sentient beings.

*— Joan White*

## A Day in the Life by Jim Kahle



The alarm goes off at five. Today I am going to the workshop at the Center. As usual, I'm getting dressed in the dark, trying not to wake up Allyn. It's one and a half hours to the Center, and I need to be there by 7:30.

The drive is uneventful. The traffic is sparse on Route 7 this early in the morning on a Saturday. I pull into the driveway, and the

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## MISSION

*The Vermont Zen Center's mission is to create a peaceful and inviting environment to support those who seek wisdom, compassion, joy, and equanimity within a Buddhist context. The two-fold practice of the Center is to overcome the causes of suffering through spiritual development and to alleviate the world's suffering through outreach activities and the cultivation of a caring attitude to the earth.*

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workshop sign for Thomas Road is already in place. I'm thinking that one of the residents, Ramiro, Polly, or Sandra, must have put it out earlier in the morning. As I pull in, I notice that the lawn has been recently mowed, and that makes a big difference to the Center's appearance for people coming for the first time. I walk up the gravel path to the doorway, and there is Louise, raking the pathway before the arrival of the participants.

I walk in the door and put away my shoes. Not all of the workers have arrived yet, but Polly is already hard at work in the kitchen. I put up the other welcome sign that goes by the entrance to the link. It's a busy day today. There's the workshop followed by preparation and rehearsal for a ceremony in conjunction with the International Day of World Peace. After that there is a memorial service for Jorge Quiros. The workshop helpers are Dharman, Josh, Eric, Heather, Polly, Nowa, and me.

The workshop is a half-day event and goes off without any major hitches. After the refreshments, the informational meeting, and items for sale, we quickly segue into cleanup mode. Amazingly, Nowa has already set up the zendo and Buddha hall for Sunday's ceremony. Cleanup ensues in the dining room and the kitchen. The living room furniture is returned to the usual places. Roshi helps to wrestle one of the sofas out of the handicapped entryway and into its proper place.

“There is always plenty to do, and there isn't any paid staff. All of the work is done by volunteers. I'm involved in some of the work at the Center, but I'm sure that what I see happening is only the tip of the iceberg.”

The memorial ceremony for Jorge is scheduled for 2:00, and the rehearsal for the World Peace ceremony is to take place beforehand. There are ten people, including Roshi, who are involved in the rehearsal. Ramiro is the lead chanter, and he rushes in from wherever he's been during the morning. Dave drove all the way from Morrisville to take part in the planning that probably takes a half hour to complete.

The rehearsal ends and most of us wait in the living room for the signal for the memorial service to begin. Another half dozen members arrived for the service. I don't remember them all, but Joan, Susan and Emily were present. I sit next to Emily in the living room, and she gives me a hard time about my haircut.

The memorial service is short but powerful. Everything seems to be on track for tomorrow's events. I head for home. I get halfway

through Middlebury when I remember that I'm supposed to pick up the bread for tomorrow's lunch. I head back to the bakery, and pick it up. Whew.

I make the long drive home. It's been a busy day and I'm tired. In the evening, I'm working on a sudoku when the phone rings. It's Cheryl. She and Manju have been working in the kitchen since the end of the memorial service. Cheryl isn't sure about the status of the bread. I tell her that I have it, and will bring it up early on Sunday per Mitra's instructions.

And so ends another day in the life of the Center, or should I say the lives of the members. There is always plenty to do, and there isn't any paid staff. All of the work is done by volunteers. I'm involved in some of the work at the Center, but I'm sure that what I see happening is only the tip of the iceberg. During the summer the gardens need to be attended to, and the lawn needs mowing. The temple needs to be kept clean, and there's always laundry to wash, fold, and put away. Meals need to be planned. Food needs to be purchased, prepared, and cooked. Again, just the tip of the iceberg.

I attended the Garden Weekend and stayed overnight on Saturday night. I got up early on Sunday

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# Lessons from a Caring Pilot **by Eric Berger**

Charlie Rose recently interviewed Chesley Sullenberger about the time he was forced to land an airplane on the Hudson River. Captain Sullenberger's responses and demeanor were inspiring and, in several ways, concordant with our Dharma practice.

As you may recall, Captain Sullenberger took off from La Guardia airport on January 15, 2009 with 155 passengers and crew on board. Shortly after takeoff the airplane lost all thrust from its engines after they failed from multiple bird strikes. With only 208 seconds of airtime, the captain and his co-pilot reacted, made decisions, and took actions to try to save the people on board.

Statistically, it was a long shot to land the plane without its destruction and loss of life. But land it safely they did and no one was lost. People who are not pilots probably can't imagine what it took to land that airliner safely in water. My father, who flew in a heavy

bomber in WWII used to tell me that any landing you walk away from is a good landing.

With respect to Dharma practice, several things Captain Sullenberger said inspired and resonated with me. First off, he is humble. He does not portray himself a hero, does not speak highly of himself, or talk about how he saved everyone. Rather, he speaks about the people and teamwork that went into creating the conditions for a safe landing: the conduct and help of his co-pilot, the controllers at La Guardia, and the other crew members on the plane. During those moments, he had the help and support of a "Sangha" on the plane with everyone working together, as he said, to try to bring about the best outcome. Isn't this what we do as we help and support each other on the Way, practicing to bring about the best outcome — our waking up? How could we do this alone?

As he said during the interview, the first thoughts that arose after

the engines died were, "This can't be happening," followed by "This doesn't happen to me," followed by "This flight is probably not going to land on a runway undamaged." He let them go. How many times have the monitors, Roshi, Zen Master Dogen, and other teachers urged us to not get caught up in thoughts?

Sullenberger: "There was no room for extraneous thoughts. I didn't think about my family. I never once thought about anything other than controlling my body's huge physiological response to this sudden event and about flying the airplane and flying it well..." He also said, "We never trained for this type of landing. It can't be practiced in a simulator." Still, he was confident he could find a way to do this. Seeing "...the world rushing up at us," the only chance for a safe landing without the plane coming apart was to land on the water at just the right speed while keeping the wings level (later analysis revealed the right wing was just one-half of one degree from level),

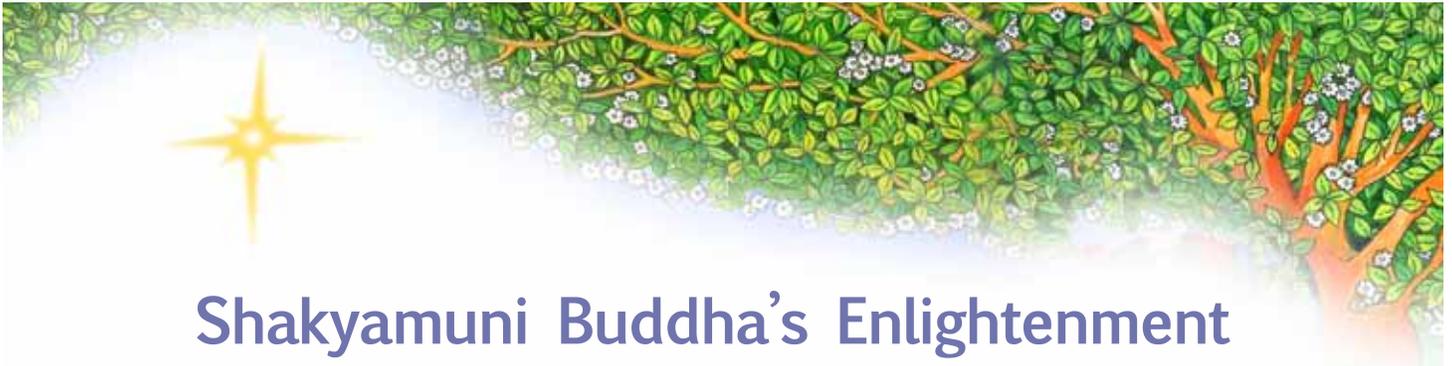
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morning and walked by the flower kitchen. There were plants in the sink, waiting to be transformed into beautiful floral arrangements on altars. When and how did they get there? Who brought them? When I stop for a moment and think about all of the goings-on at

the Center, seen and unseen, I am filled with wonder. There are so many activities on so many fronts. Everything seems to happen so smoothly and seamlessly. Most of the time there doesn't really appear to be anyone in charge. Members know what needs to be done

and they just do it. I am grateful to be a small part of such a joyous beehive of activity in the Dharma, for the Dharma. I am grateful and appreciative of the efforts of all by Dharma brothers and sisters. They are truly the elixir by which a sangha is transformed into a Sangha. —



## Shakyamuni Buddha's Enlightenment

*At the age of twenty-nine, the Prince of the Shakya Clan, Siddhartha Gautama, saw for the first time: one old man, one sick man, one dead man, one monk, and with that he was plunged into a struggle for Truth which was to continue until Buddhahood itself had been attained.*

The ceremony of Shakyamuni Buddha's Enlightenment will take place at the Center during the evening sitting on **Thursday, December 8, starting at 8 p.m.** For the past several years this ceremony has taken place on the opening night of Rohatsu sesshin. However,

this year it takes place prior to Rohatsu, which starts on the 10th.

The Buddha's Enlightenment Ceremony commemorates Shakyamuni Buddha's spiritual realization and opening of the Way. His experience, the culmination of years of intense effort, came after seven days

of deep meditation when he saw the morning star.

The ceremony begins with an account of the Buddha's Enlightenment, followed by chanting and a symbolic reading of all the sutras. Please join us for this special event. —

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and having the nose angled up at 10 degrees (it was at 9.8 degrees). Everyone survived.

Lin-chi said, "When students of the Way fail to make progress, what is the problem? The problem is they don't have faith in themselves." The confidence of Captain Sullenberger is perhaps of a more psychological kind than what Master Lin-chi was teaching. Still, the point stands. Do we have faith in ourself? Or do we think and talk ourselves, in a sense, out of our Self?

As in our practice, the Captain

spoke about the benefits of hard work and years of training and experience that were naturally present, available, and manifesting during the descent.

Captain Sullenberger said his favorite definition of courage is, "Not the absence of fear, but doing what you need to do in spite of it. It's doing your best even though it's startling, disturbing, and difficult." I'll bow to that. On the mat and during daily practice is there any one of us who hasn't met with sad, challenging, or frightening experiences?

Finally, Captain Sullenberger spoke at length about the importance of living beyond our self-interest. He described piloting as his calling and said he never lost sight that it was about the safety of all his passengers. "It's about doing things for the right reasons, not for your own enhancement, but for the greater good. It's having the moral courage to act against your own immediate self-interest..." in service of that good. Thank you, Captain Sullenberger. —

# New Year's Eve Ceremony 2016-2017

**O**n Saturday evening, December 31, the Center will celebrate the beginning of the New Year with zazen, repentance, chanting, the Precepts, and a prayer for peace. Chanting and silence—with a bit of Buddhist bedlam at midnight—is a truly wonderful way to welcome the New Year. Friends and family are cordially invited to come to this ceremony; non-sitters can wait out the zazen portions in the living room or bring a chair into the zendo.

For the New Year's Ceremony, bring some type of noisemaker with you, such as a kazoo, harmonica, recorder, or drum. Part of the ceremony is a noise-making kinhin to "drive out the demons." We will also read the (unsigned) resolutions of ceremony participants. Write these resolutions down and place them in the resolution bowl when you arrive. This year we will be ringing the Temple Bell 108 times during the evening. The schedule for New Year's Eve is as follows:



- |          |  |
|----------|--|
| 8-9:30   | <i>Formal zazen with kinhin. Ringing of Temple Bell begins.</i>                  |
| 9:30     | <i>Repentance ceremony followed by a tea break.</i>                              |
| 10:30    | <i>Formal zazen. Reading of resolutions. Purification of Altars.</i>             |
| 11:50    | <i>Driving out of Demons Circumambulation: Chanting and noise making.</i>        |
| Midnight | <i>Cacophony, ending with "Happy New Year! May Peace Prevail on Earth!"</i>      |
| 12:01    | <i>Moment of silence. Chanting: Prajna Paramita. Abbreviated Jukai Ceremony.</i> |
| 12:20    | <i>Candle-lighting Ceremony. New Year's Prayer. Refreshments.</i>                |

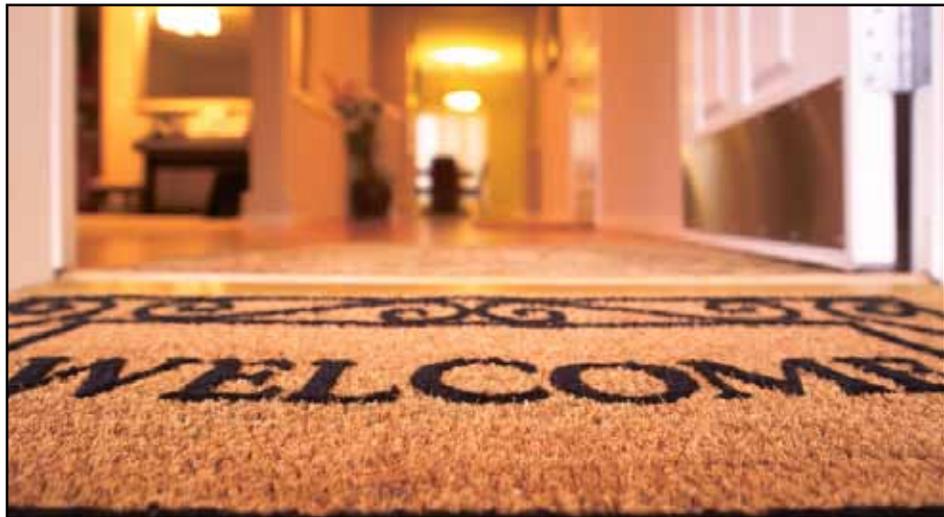
Please come — **members are welcome to bring family and children.** The kids can sleep in the bedrooms until the circumambulation or take part in all the ceremonies if they wish. **Non-member adults** (no children, please) are also cordially invited. If you are coming from a distance and need to spend the night, you are welcome to stay at the Center; just let us know ahead of time. A lot happens throughout the evening, so it is helpful to know who is coming. You can sign up on the sheet on the bulletin board or, if you live out of town, give a call. We hope you will join us!

# Home Purification Ceremonies

## Entering 2017 With a Contented Home

**B**uddhists love cleanliness both in their temples and their minds. Therefore, it is no surprise that the traditional preparation for the New Year is to thoroughly clean one's home. Surfaces are dusted, closets straightened, drawers cleaned, everything put in order. To welcome the New Year, many people set up special altars throughout their homes with candles, incense, and greenery.

Once the cleaning is complete, you can arrange to have Sangha members come to your house to perform a **Home Purification Ceremony**. Through this ceremony, all the unseen pollutants of greed, anger, and ignorance are ritually driven away. It is a spiritual cleansing, which complements the physical one. Since our environment is an extension of ourselves, by cleaning it we, too, are purified.



The ceremony consists of chanting, prostrations, and a circumambulation throughout the house with doors open and lights shining. At every altar incense is offered and candles are lit while the *Sho Sai Myo* is chanted. You can actually feel your house responding

happily, and you, too, will feel renewed. It is a wonderful way to enter the New Year, with body, mind and home cleansed and purified. To participate, please sign up at the Center or ask your Dharma friends to join you. —

## Rags

by Lynne Davis

**D**uring sesshin, the Center takes on a special glow that emanates from Dharma sisters and brothers' full attention to sweeping, scrubbing, washing, scouring, vacuuming, polishing, wiping and shining every nook and cranny. At the end of the work period, the rags are deposited in a basket in the laundry room.

It can be said that every job assigned during sesshin offers a unique opportunity to pay attention. During the August sesshin, my job was

laundry. Every day, a bin filled with rags was washed, dried and folded, ready for the next work period. It was during the folding of rags that a sense of gratitude began to emerge and ripen for me.

Rags are discards, no longer needed for their original purpose. Once, they were the dishtowels in the kitchen, someone's favorite t-shirt, a baby's diaper, a nightgown or sweat pants. They have passed through many hands, from those who sewed them, from

those who cultivated and harvested the fibers, from the tiny microbes in the soil, to the great elements of earth, sun, wind, and rain that supported life and growth. These traces of being passed through our hands as we sweep, scrub, wash, scour, fold. With gratitude, we can hold them with lovingkindness. With gratitude we can say "thank you" as we just Sweep! Just Scrub! Just Wash! Just Fold! And when the rags are deposited in the basket for washing, we gassho for helping to create this shining Center we treasure. —

# December 2016

| Sunday  | Monday                   | Tuesday             | Wednesday | Thursday                                       | Friday | Saturday                         |
|---|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------|--|--------|----------------------------------|
|   |                          |                     |           | 1<br>PM ZAZEN                                  | 2      | 3                                |
| Costa Rica 3-Day Sesshin (11/30-12/3)                                   |                          |                     |           |  |        |                                  |
| 4<br>Sesshin Set-up   | 5<br>AM ZAZEN<br>MON-FRI | 6<br>Sesshin Set-up | 7         | 8<br>THE BUDDHA'S<br>ENLIGHTENMENT<br>CEREMONY | 9      | 10<br>Sesshin                    |
| 11  | 12                       | 13                  | 14        | 15   | 16     | 17                               |
| Vermont 7-Day Rohatsu Sesshin 12/10-17 <b>VZC CLOSED DURING SESSHIN</b> |                          |                     |           |  |        |                                  |
| 18  | 19                       | 20                  | 21        | 22   | 23     | 24                               |
| ZEN CENTER CLOSED FOR THE HOLIDAYS 12/18-26                             |                          |                     |           |  |        |                                  |
| 25<br>ZEN CENTER CLOSED   | 26                       | 27                  | 28        | 29   | 30     | 31<br>NEW YEAR'S<br>EVE CEREMONY |
| New Year's Eve Ceremony Workdays  |                          |                     |           |  |        |                                  |



## Workdays for New Year's Eve

Tuesday, December 27, through Friday, December 30, will be devoted to cleaning our temple in preparation for the New Year. Altars are set up throughout the Center, the house is cleaned from top to bottom, and everything is refreshed for the coming year.

If you can spare an hour or two or help any time during the week, it would be greatly appreciated. With our temple cleaned and purified, we will usher in the New Year on Saturday evening.

### WINTER ADVISORY

As cold weather approaches, please keep in mind that if there is a storm watch, heavy snowfall, or dangerous driving conditions on the day of a sitting, teisho or ceremony, please call the Center before setting out as the sitting might be canceled. In any event, it's best not to venture forth if you feel the roads are unsafe.



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*Walking in the night,  
Snow is falling,  
A farewell to the year.*  
—Shara



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*Wishing you  
a Happy,  
Healthy,  
and Peaceful  
New Year!*

